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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 006093

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: 30 OF 57 PRESIDENTIAL APPLICANTS PASS FIRST

HURDLE: ELECTION COMMISSION TO REVIEW APPEALS AND TRIM

LIST FURTHER BEFORE LAUNCH OF 19-DAY CAMPAIGN SEASON

REF: A. CAIRO 5944

[B](#). CAIRO 5592

[C](#). CAIRO 4997

[D](#). CAIRO 4519

Classified by Acting DCM Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#). (C) Following a weekend review of applications, the Presidential Election Commission (PEC) determined on August 6 that only 30 out of a total of 57 applicants seeking to compete for the presidency met basic eligibility criteria under the Presidential Elections Law. While all 27 non-party affiliated "independents" fell short of the eligibility criteria, one third of them have filed appeals with the Ministry of Justice, which observers believe will quickly reject them. The PEC will also select sole candidates for each party that submitted multiple nominees, eliminating at least another 14 names. Wafd Party Chair No'man Gomaa's decision to run may undermine Ayman Nour's support, and has led to speculation that the decision was the result of a deal with the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) whereby Wafd would pick up extra seats in Parliament. Other opinion posits that the Wafd decided to field Gomaa because it judges Nour to be a weaker adversary than expected, and is no longer worried about embarrassment at the polls. The PEC will release its final list of candidates for the September 7 election no later than August 13, and the formal campaign season will take place between August 17 and September 4. The promise of open access for candidates to state media remains spotty, with the advantage clearly in President Mubarak's favor. End summary.

Commission Deadline Passes; 30 Candidates Pre-Qualify

[2](#). (SBU) The 10-member Presidential Election Commission closed its doors at 8:00 p.m. August 4, marking the close of the official application period for Egypt's first-ever contested Presidential election. According to the PEC, which spent the weekend reviewing applications, only 30 of a total of 57 applicants met the official eligibility criteria. Each of these 30 "pre-qualified" applicants belong to officially sanctioned and active political parties, including President Mubarak of the NDP, Ayman Nour of the Ghad Party, No'man Gomaa of the Wafd Party, and representatives from an additional 13 parties.

Parties Submit Multiple Names; PEC To Select One

[3](#). (SBU) Interestingly, six parties each submitted multiple candidates for the Presidential race, leaving the PEC (under the Presidential Elections Law) the responsibility for selecting a single candidate from each party represented on the final ballot. This will lead to at least another 14 names from six political parties being cut from the "pre-qualified" list of 30. It remains unclear what criteria the Commission will use to determine which of the names are to be cut. Unlike the American system where party conventions select a single candidate to nominate, parties such as the Liberal Party, the Shaab Democratic Party, and the Young Egypt Party offered up to five names each.

27 Candidates Disqualified So Far; Appeals Expected to Fail

[4](#). (SBU) As expected (ref B), not one of the 27 "independents" who filed applications with the PEC was approved. Of these, 9 subsequently filed appeals with the Ministry of Justice, although most analysts expect the Ministry to quickly reject the appeals because the applicants did not meet the eligibility criteria set out for independent candidates. (Note: The law requires independent candidates to secure backing from 250 elected officials, including a minimum of 65 Members of Parliament from the People's

Assembly, 25 members of the Shura Council, and 140 officials from provincial local councils. End note.) Additionally, press reports on August 8 quote Commission Spokesman Osama Atawya as saying that only ten candidates remain in the race, based on unspecified disqualification criteria. The final list, according to the Election Law must be released at least 25 days before the September 7 election date (i.e., no later than August 13).

Wafd Candidate Decides to Run; Deal Cut with NDP?

15. (C) The only real surprise on the candidacy list was the inclusion in the race of Wafd Party Chairman No'man Gomaa, whose party had earlier declined to field a candidate. Nevertheless, in announcing his last-minute candidacy, the former Dean of Cairo University's Law School claimed that it would be inappropriate for Egypt's oldest party to not be represented (ref A). The move has led to rumors that Wafd may have reached a deal with the NDP to enter the race in return for assistance in obtaining additional seats for Wafd in upcoming Parliamentary elections. (Note: A five percent Parliamentary representation figure will be the required threshold for candidates in the next presidential election. End note.) However, other sources believe Wafd made the decision based on the calculation that Ayman Nour was not the threat they anticipated, and that they stood to fare better in the election than previously thought. Indeed, Ayman Nour has been very quiet since the postponement of his trial, leading some to suggest he is not the force that many observers had thought he was. One of his advisors, however, suggested to us that Nour was simply "keeping his powder dry" until the official campaign period begins.

Questions of Fairness Raised by Nour's Ghad Party

16. (SBU) Along with earlier and well-known complaints of intimidation and thuggery, Ayman Nour and his Tomorrow Party are upset over the manner in which the Presidential Election Commission has handled the issue of campaign symbols. Claiming to have arrived first on line for the opening of the Commission's office the day that applications were to be submitted, Nour contends that he should have been granted first choice of symbols to accompany his name and party affiliation on the final ballot. The red crescent symbol, long associated with President Mubarak and state authority, was Nour's first choice as it is well recognized by an Egyptian population with a forty-percent adult illiteracy rate. Subsequently, however, the PEC announced that Mubarak and the NDP would have the crescent while the Ghad Party would be assigned its second choice, the palm tree. The seemingly capricious decision by the PEC, Nour contends, is one more indication of how the cards are stacked against opponents of Mubarak and the ruling party.

19-Day Election Cycle Set to Begin; Media Access Mixed

17. (SBU) Once the PEC publishes its final list of candidates, the 19-day formal campaign period will take place from August 17 until September 4. Candidates will have the option of accepting public funding totaling 500,000 Egyptian Pounds (approximately USD 90,000) to spend on media, access to which has been promised to be free and open. Already, local media are abuzz with news of the election and prospective candidates, and are beginning to print platform descriptions. The air waves are also full of interviews with better-known candidates on a variety of public and private television talk shows. Nevertheless, complaints are numerous about the extent of governmental and ruling party control over media access and obvious loopholes. As one example, election-related rules on media access do not count the President's normal day-to-day work as campaigning. There is already speculation, however, that Mubarak will limit his official duties during the campaign period to avoid this criticism. For example, the GOE is seeking new dates for an Arab League summit--postponed by the death of King Fahd--prior to the August 17 start of the campaign.

18. (SBU) To date, among contenders for the presidency, Wafd's Gomaa and Ghad's Nour are getting the most attention in pro-government media channels. Other, lesser-known candidates are receiving only brief press coverage, although papers are beginning to list respective party platforms of the likely final candidates - a trend we expect to continue once the PEC announces its final list. Conversely, President Mubarak's daily appearances and public speeches are covered extensively, especially on the crucial state-controlled television. TV is critical given high illiteracy rates. While press coverage will undoubtedly be in Mubarak's favor, we expect that Information Minister Annas El-Fekki (also Mubarak's media campaign manager) will strive to provide

enough coverage of opposition candidates to argue the fairness of the election.

Comment

19. (C) So far, the first steps on the road to Egypt's first Presidential election are playing out largely as expected. Strict candidacy rules have eliminated all non-party independent candidates, rumors are circulating of ruling party deal making, and media coverage to date has been strongly in President Mubarak's favor. While Egypt is now seized with the new experience of presidential campaigning, given the relatively short official campaign period of only 19 days, and the various institutional advantages that will benefit the incumbent, we believe that the more meaningful electoral opportunity for Egyptians remains the People's Assembly elections which will take place after the Presidential poll. End comment.

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JONES